A GARLAND OF SONNETS

By CRAVEN LANGSTROTH BETT

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A GARLAND OF SONNETS

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BY

CRAVEN LANGSTROTH BETTS

In Praise of the Poets

INGOMAR—Of what use are garlands?
PARTHENIA—Their use is to be fair.

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To TITUS MUNSON COAN

True poet, fine critic, and genial friend.

FOREWORD

Child of Petrarch and the lyric muse, thou wert born in the days of Chivalry and Romance, and all thy earliest youth was touched by Love. Angelo, the immortal, found for thee a deeper note, and the magnificent Lorenzo gave thee added grace. Next, those twins of English rhyme, Surrey and Wyatt, rescued thee from the neglect of Fame, and nourished thee on English ground. "The gentle Spenser loved thee," and the high-born Sydney was thy servitor.

But thy crowning glory was to be the guest of Shakespere, the Prince of Song. He took from thee thy Italian mantle and decked thee in his own royal robes. No man shall henceforth do thee ampler honor. Under the hand of the mighty Milton thou obtained an organ tone—thy note of Reverence and Prayer. But the degenerate children of English Song abjured thee or gave but grudging habitation, until Wordsworth, Priest of Nature, ushered thee into his calm and stately cloisters. There thy plastic soul took on fresh harmonies and delights; new aspirations, fair hopes, sweet consolations and confidings. In thy turn thou becamest a teacher of men; and henceforth thou must remain the favored heir of the English Muse.

It behooves not to tell of all the illustrious masters who have

taken thee to their hearts. The Old World still loves thy ordered walk, and the New has opened wide its doors and enriched thee. To each hast thou spoken in a different key, for thy nature is variant as the flowers of mountain and field, of garden and forest. Of all the children of Song, I, dwelling in the strict bonds of rhyme, love thee best, for, if thou demandest much, thy favors are bountiful to them who worthily seek thee.

But for them not of the true Brotherhood, wilt thou dig a pit-fall and cover the pretender and the careless wooer with shame. Therefore, O Sonnet, may my feet tread reverently in thy service, and in the name of these Masters be all this my cherishing of thee —so shalt thou obtain the larger honor and I perchance a favor more sweet. For my offering I bespeak the good-will of all true votaries of the Muse, and of all others who worship and love her but have been holden from bringing gifts to her shrine. In their hands I leave thee, beloved Sonnet, my companion and the solace of my heart!

C. L. B.

The thanks of the Author are due to the "Outlook" (New York) for permission to use the Sonnets on Chaucer, Spenser, and Morris, and to Frederick Keppel & Co. for reproducing a number of portraits.

HOMER

Time hath no shore, nor History port for thee,
Thou first great admiral of the fleets of Song!
To thee the winds, the waves, the clouds belong—
The heart and brain of broad humanity.
Thy theme, swift-winged, an eagle's flight, and free,
Far-seeing, sweeps this varied world along,
Wide-shadowing all the crawling, fluttering throng,
Unbounded as the shining, thundering sea!

From thy vast coffers kinsmen, age on age,
Have stored their treasuries to remint the gold;
Through thee the smooth-lipped alien hath grown bold,
While wise Ulysses' guile, Achilles' rage,
Doomed Hector's love, from thy dead tongue are rolled,
And still dead gods gigantic battle wage!

CHAUCER

The heart of Merrie England sang in thee,
Dan Chaucer, blithest of the sons of Morn!
How from that dim and mellow distance borne
Come floating down thy measures pure and free,
Minstrel of Pilgrim pleasaunce! Pagentry,
And Revel, blowing from his drinking-horn
The froth of malt, and Love that dwells forlorn—
England shall live in these that live through-thee!

Thine is the jocund Springtime;—winsome May,
Crowned with her daisies, wooed thee, clerkly wight!
The breath of pastoral cheer is in thy lay,
And in thy graver verse thy nation's might.
O, Pan-pipe, blown at England's break of day,
Re-echo through her noon thy clear delight!

TASSO

Love gilds thy laurel,—love was found thy blame;
Yet, brightest in the dungeon shone thy muse.
Not Este, no, nor Italy, might refuse
Thy due—the poet's wreath, the deathless name.
Thine honor lustres in thy tyrant's shame;
The cold cell's damps were Inspiration's dews;
The world hath won through what thy hope did lose,
Oh, Tasso, king of hearts, and heir of fame!

Ferrara's court, by that impassioned dream
Honored and blest, grew envious and ingrate;
O, knightliest bard! Rinaldo's hero-gleam
Is thine, thrice glorified; thy proud estate,
The Lyre, the Sword, and Love—in each supreme;
Life's splendid offering at the throne of Fate!

SPENSER

I've watched him stroll with Raleigh by the wood,
Or Sidney, near the Mulla's rippling brim,
While Nature crooned her Summer-evening hymn,
Till o'er the fields the new moon's syckle stood.
I've heard calm words of courtly brotherhood
Chime like an Angelus through the ages dim,
And they, whom all else honored, honored him,
My Spenser, votary of the Holy Rood.

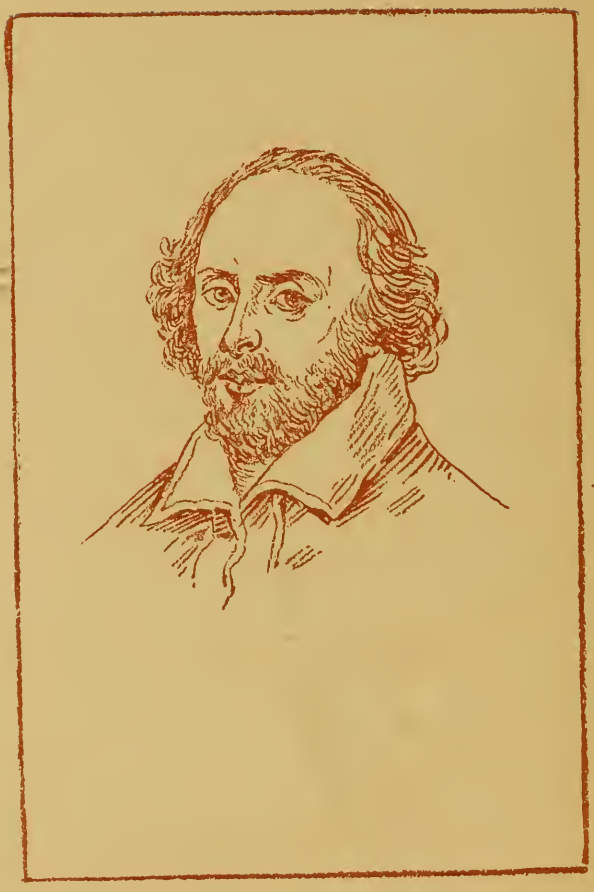
They rose and passed through Honor's troubled sky;
Each quenched in blood his fitful, fervent star;
He dwelt apart, unknown, and fixed his eye
Where aureoled Beauty beckoned him afar.
Thy Lion, Maid, and Knight can never die,
O Childe, for of them England's glories are!

IV

MARLOWE

For him the ancient heavens relumed their fires
And starred his crown of song with lambent gleams;
While Hero's torch a nightly cresset beams
For all Leanders of wide-winged desires;
Yet dark and thundrous, as when Faust expires,
And fraught with lightning stands the mount of dreams
Down which the lava of his passion streams,
Or soars from off its cloud-enshrouded pyres.

He was the Baptist heralding the morn
Of Poesy's adorèd Prince of Light.
He hath no sponsor save his muse forlorn;
A voice all sweetness and impetuous might,
A heart unbridled and a hope death-shorn
Remains—and squandered blood that hides from sight!

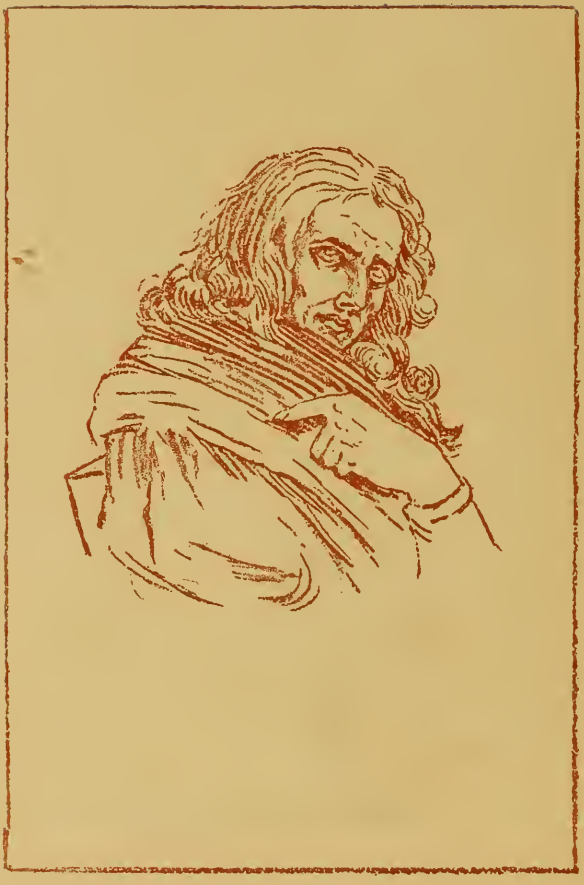


SHAKESPERE

When the brave tackle of Life's craft is torn,
And Hope's high pennon frays before the blast,
My star of guidance vanished in the Vast,
And the dun night grown deathful and forlorn—
Then, turning fain to thee, the gates of Morn
Swing heaven-wide, and the clouds, all overcast,
Are rolled from sight ; the rocks and shoals are passed ;
Safe on thy affluent ocean I am borne !

There I hear Ariel singing ; there they file,
The winged sea creatures, to their mystic lair ;
There with unnumbered kiss fair Morning's smile
Blazons the waters, vivifies the air ;
While down the spangled deeps, in sportive guile,
The sea-nymphs flash their ivory arms in air !

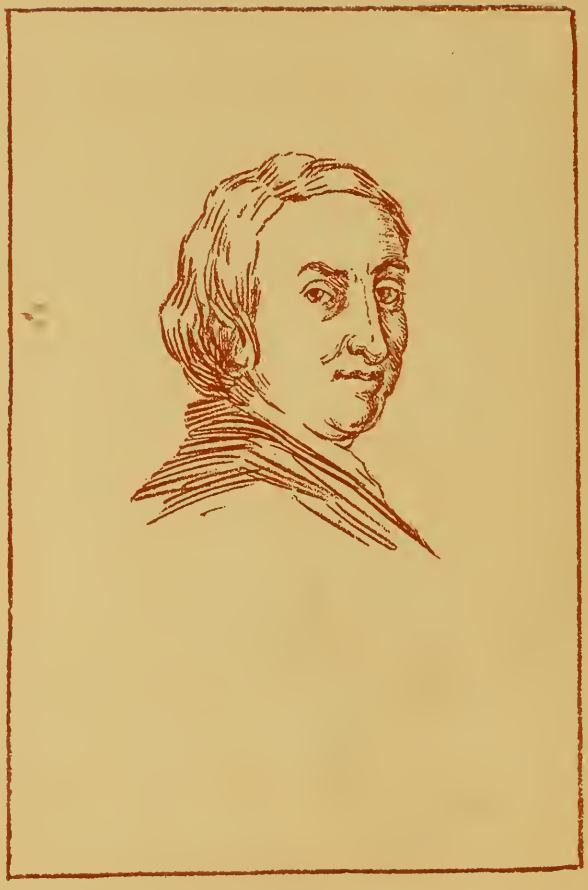
VI



MILTON

For thrice ten years the paladin's hand and brain
Upheld thine altar, Freedom, o'er thy land!
Then Heaven those later lustres did command,
That orb of song that set without a stain,
Then rose in power perpetual, doth remain
Unshorn of glory, destined to expand
Supreme o'er Heaven and Hell, voicing the grand
Oceans of knowledge, sacred and profane.

Beside the laureled Tuscan doth he rest
O'erlooking all the worlds, and on his brow
The amaranth of God, the poet's vow,
And the deep love for England in his breast.
O, Sampson of our Israel, would that thou
Wert living still to strike for earth's oppressed!

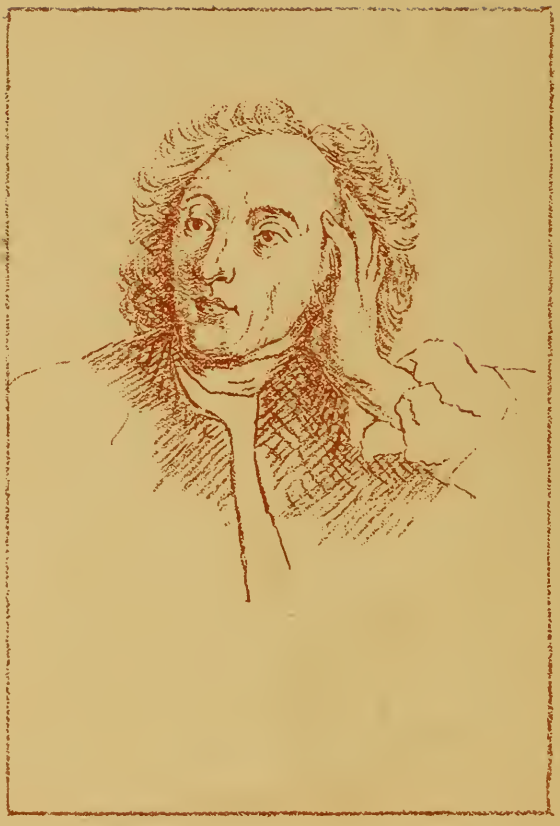


DRYDEN

There sits he with the wits around his chair,
Sipping his cordial or his cup of tea;
Fair primed with aphorisms choice or free,
The "glorious John," who trimmed to every air!
The biggest brawn on the arena there,
He shook the town with vauntings, then on knee
Bartered his birthright for a huckster's fee,
And thrust his muse aneath a lordling's care.

Still he wrought valiant service; none that day
Might bide the baited gladiator's blows;
His ponderous truncheon crushed the foe at bay;
How grand to watch him on McFlecnoe close!
The drums resound, the trumpets loudly bray
As down the age that lordly galleon goes!

VIII



POPE

Behold the foe of Grub Street's rival schools,
The Richard Crookback of the kings of rhyme,
Forging firm couplets of heroic chime,
And routing all his masters at their rules!
How full an arsenal of shining tools
He brought to shape his fanciful sublime,
Spurning each proud Mecænas of the time,
And shoving all the dunces from their stools!

And you deny him greatness? Would to-day
Your acrobatic bards could fill his place!
His art and range were bounded? Who can sway
More forceful measures in a narrow space?
Yield him, O Fame, thy brightest three-leaved bay,
Mind, manners, modes—the Horace of his race!

BURNS

He was my earliest, nearest, sweetest friend!
His songs starred all my firmament of dreams;
Through them I caught the first auroral gleams
Of Her whose smile will haunt me to the end.
There was my gold, the gold I might not spend;
There was my heaven, a heaven of earthly beams;
I heard that rapture flowing like the streams;
I heard the Loves their rhythmic voices blend.

Ye banks of Ayr, how happy should ye be
Whereon the feet of your dear minstrel trod!
For even the sun, methinks, more tenderly
Than other turf must kiss your lowly sod.
O happy Scotland, earth doth envy thee
Thy kingly ploughman, thy disguised God!

SCOTT

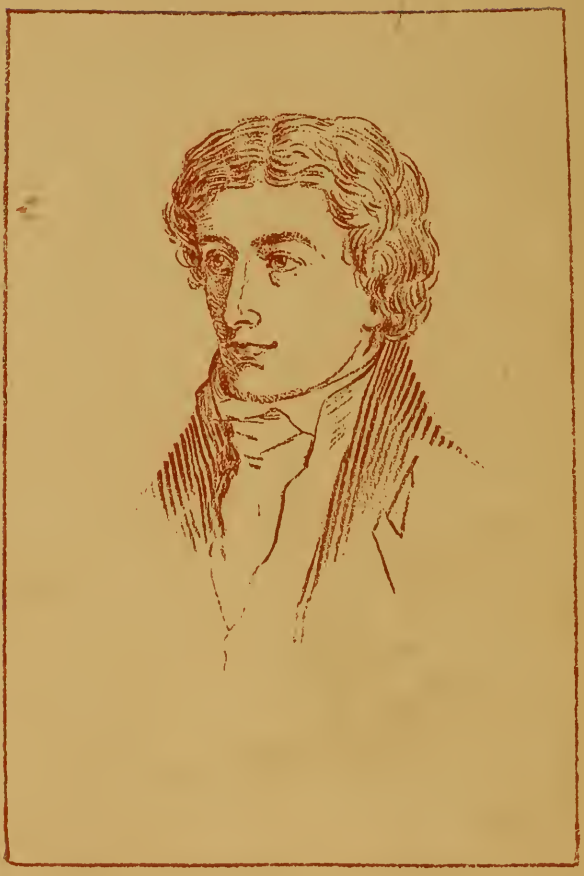
Those broad bright Marches, Ballad and Romance,
Never were ruled by baron bold like thee!
No knight to Throne or Beauty bent the knee
With more proud-souled devotion in his glance.
All stately as the Lillies of Old France
The banner of thy Fancy floated free,
O'er damsels, gallants, clansmen, monkish glee,
Pageants and courts, and tourney's crash of lance.

It gathered brilliance from auroral skies;
It pictured Love, his dole and holiday;
Widely it blazed dread deeds of high emprise,
Or flung forth wassail, feud, and gramarye;
Or caught the gleam and glint of targe and glaive,
And blew to Border gales and watched the tartans wave!

BYRON

O Fame, thy laurels graced a blighted pall !
'Twas Death's and Fortune's pact with envious Time.
The vine-wreathed Titan, clothed with power sublime,
Almost accomplished Heaven ; defying all,
He braved the levin and the thunder-brawl
Scaling the cliffs of Song ; his rebel prime
Pelion on Ossa planted ; then with rhyme
Transcendent on his lips reeled down the wall.

He fell, hard-fighting ; dire the clash and clang
Earth heard through all her limits—then sleek jays
Piped chattering funeral, and the charnel kites
Fed on the warm, proud heart ; but wide outrang,
Sweet Poesy, thy plaint along the ways,
Nor, Time, shalt thou withhold him tribute rites !



KEATS

Just as the earliest flowers began to blow,
(He felt the daisies growing o'er his grave)
His fevered heart found rest; those grasses wave
Unconscious o'er the form that sleeps below;
Yet there the "rathe primroses" surely know,
And tender violets (howsoever rave
The rude winds o'er his slumber) that he gave
Them human love in human hearts to grow.

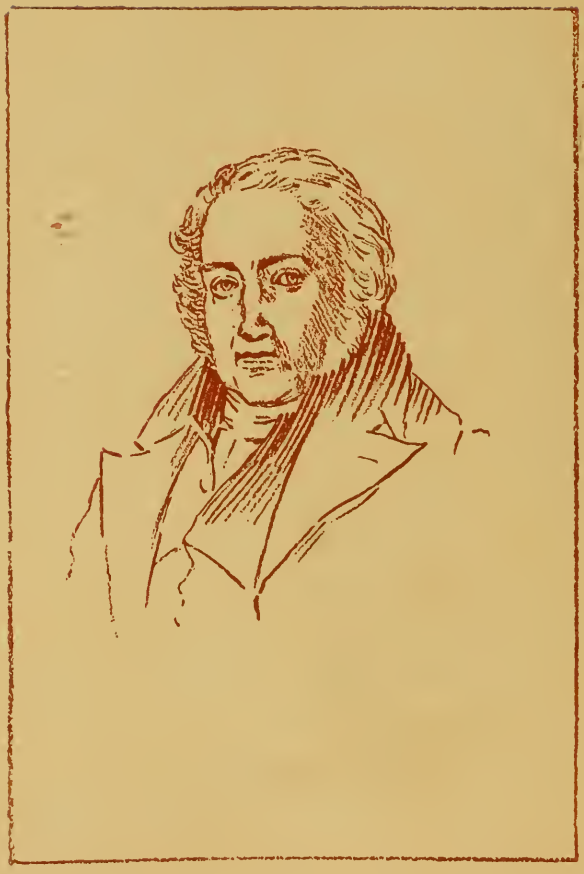
His "name was writ in water?" still 'tis called
By every dryad's ghost that mournful fleets!
That name through earth and heaven hath been extolled;
That name the Summer's requiem repeats;
But he, with charms of Fäery deep enthralled,
Hears no dull earth-tones echoing "where is Keats!"

SHELLEY

To shore the sea-nymphs buoyed their captive dead,
Touched by a human grief; yes, there lay hand,
Heart, lip, and brain of that august command,
All—save the soul that Heaven to music wed.
Clung curling yet the pale locks round the head;
Silent and prone upon the drifted sand,
He clasped her still, his loved Italian land,
The foster-mother to whose breast he fled.

We raised him on the pyre—in one great shine
The body reached the beckoning shade—'twas meet,
That which had given the flaming soul a shrine
Should incorrupt as that bright soul retreat;
Yet, heart of proof, thy substance still divine,
Lingering in earthly love, lay at our feet!

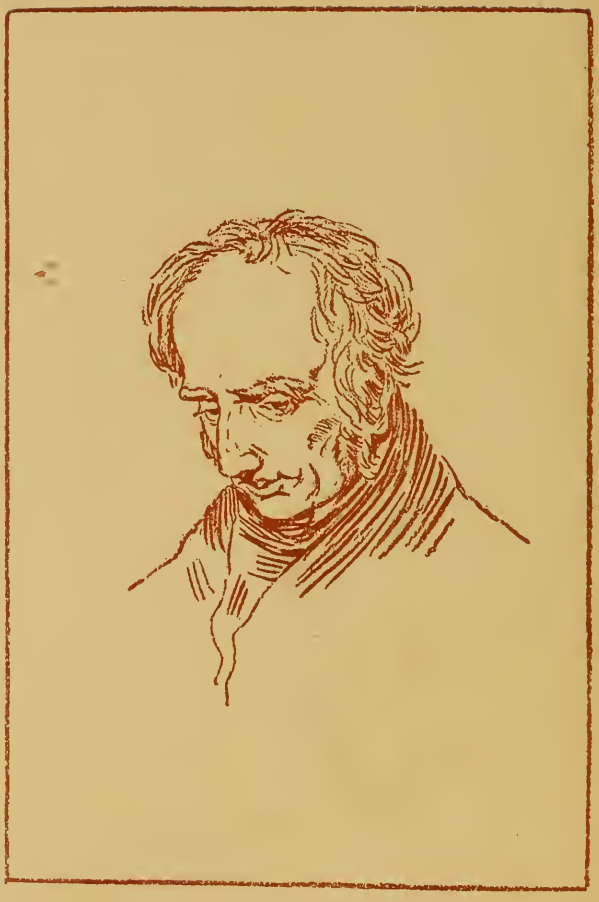
XIV



COLERIDGE

Thy mind and heart—the dome of Kubla Khan!
These twain were wed, like mountain joined to sea,
In lofty, broad, cloud-merged sublimity,
With tones that awe yet soothe the soul of man.
From Earth to Heaven thy circling vision ran,
Yet, free in thought, thyself thou could'st not free;
The Knight of Poesy, enchained in thee,
Slept on his arms and dreamed his daring plan.

Yet Truth, divined in dreams, blooms best in Art;
One dream, O mystic, blown within thy mind,
Thy Mariner's tale, of Love's own life a part,
This fadeless bay-wreath doth thy temples bind;
This magic banner floats to every wind—
One cross of service blazoned on thy heart!



WORDSWORTH

The presences of woods informed his soul;
His Muse was taught of winds and murmuring streams;
Across his vision broke Love's rarest gleams,
And English faith held o'er him proud control.
He was Truth's eremite with beechen bowl;
The wayside life and legend shaped his themes,
Borne softly through his mountain realm of dreams,
But round those heights rang Freedom's trumpet-roll.

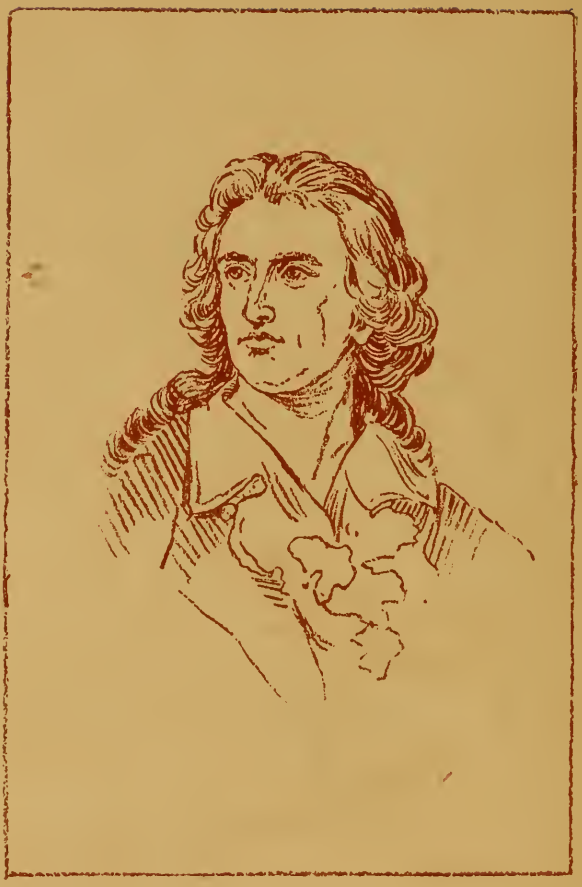
Prophet and priest and bard—the humble throng
He loved and voiced, from the great Mother drew
His litanies and choruses; the blue
Of Heaven and green of Earth illumed his song.
The Joshua, he, of Israel's chosen few,
And of his peers the Godfrey chaste and strong.

HOOD

There, midst his children's noisy, prattling play,
Hard by the dusty city's iron clang,
Like Theseus shod with wings, from earth he sprang
And soared untrammeled through the azure day.
That plumèd Fancy oared its joyous way
O'er magic oceans where the mermaids sang;
Then veered once more where human voices rang
Of Love, Want, Crime, and Boyhood's happy day.

Alas, again the pack-horse of the Press,
He folded close his pinions' glistering pride,
And to the mill of jesting Rhyme was tied,
To strain his heart-strings in that vile duress;
Yet still the ignoble task he glorified—
Through that sad mirth still flashed his loveliness!

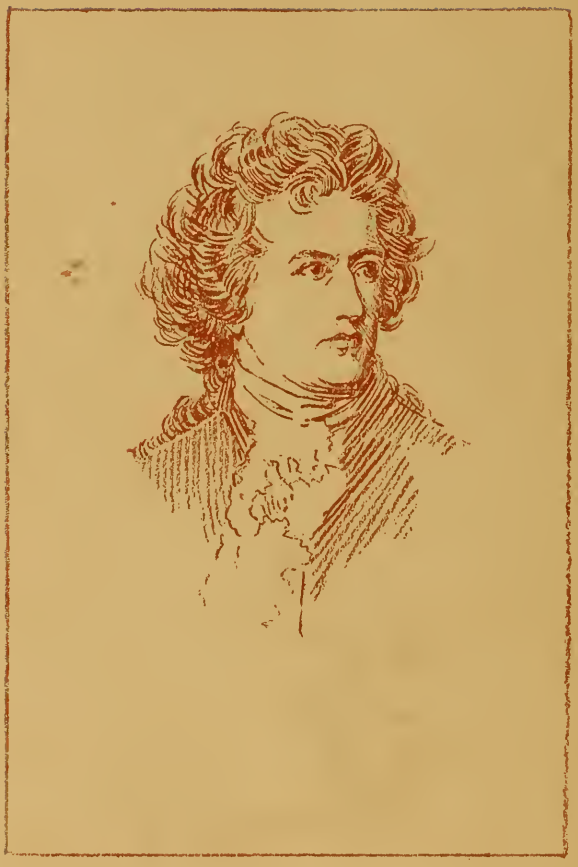
XVII



SCHILLER

Both lyric wreath and Thespian crown were thine,
And thine the Germans' pledge from mount to sea;
For thy first thought, *to make the people free,*
Was for those hungering souls Love's corn and wine.
The hapless Mary's hope illumes thy line,
While Wallenstein's dark form abides with me
Since, when a lad, I laid upon my knee
Thy heart, all throbbing through its leathern shrine.

The nations' tocsin thine! Thy Bell is heard
On distant shores scarce known to thee by name;
The deathless cadence of Tell's dauntless word,
Hath wed the Switzer's Fatherland to fame;
While Swabian youths, by thy bold measures stirred,
Their proud old Eberhard's liberties proclaim!

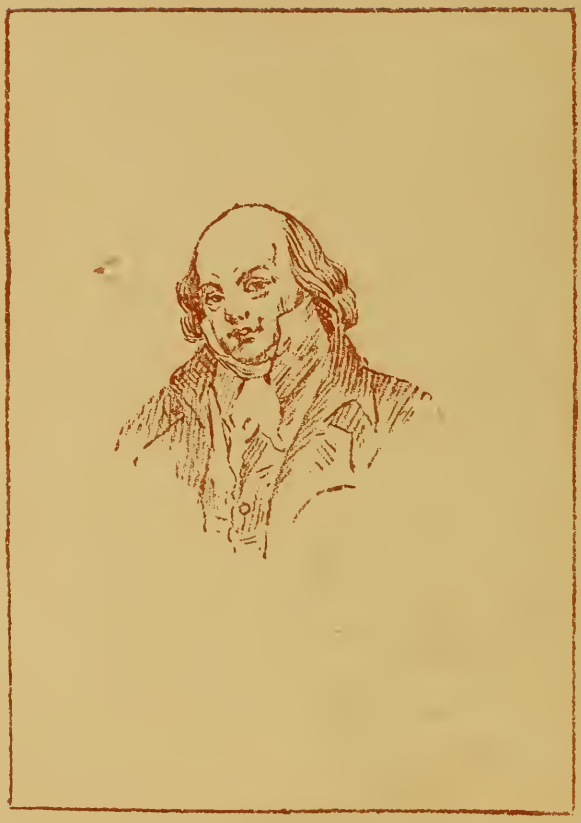


GOETHE

The great Age crowns thee—then no chaplet may
Enrich thy brow, much less this wreath I twine,
O Liberator Soul! Thou dost define
And hold life's secrets in wise-guarded sway;
And yet thy art looms amplest, and thy lay
Pours forth enlightening flame; and as the Rhine
Ripples to sea, thy human-pulsing line
Speeds world round, broadening its imperial way.

Goetz, Wilhelm Meister, Faust—no haughtier themes
By wizard genius e'er conceived or penned!
These will not cease "to feed our lake of dreams,"
Nor will churl Time outbrave them at the end.
Thought—Love—inwoven thus thy laurel gleams;
Poet and Seer—yea, wisest, truest Friend!

XIX



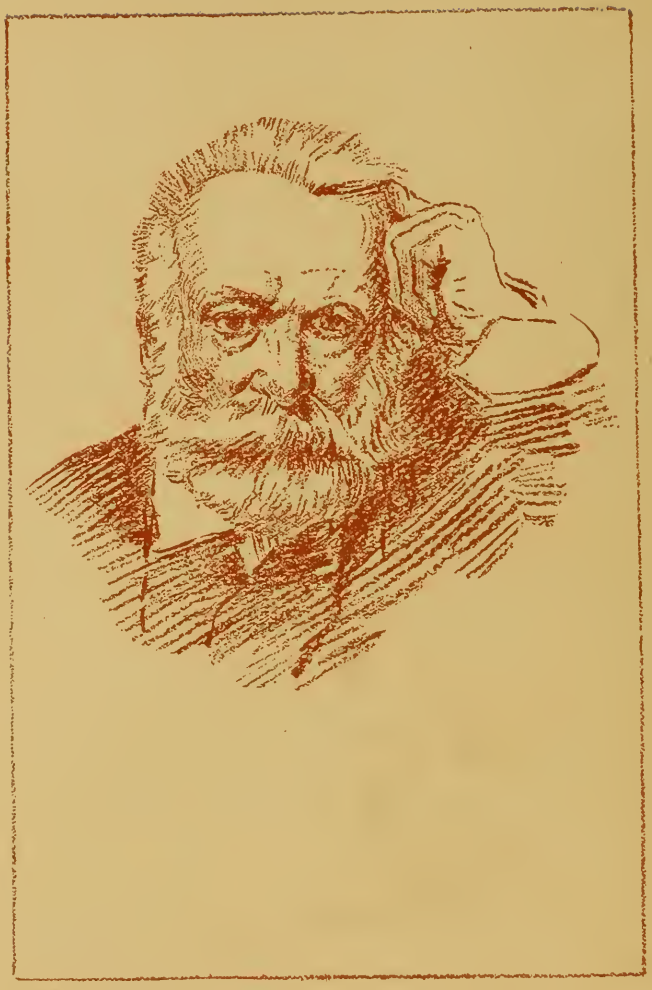
BÈRANGER

(At the Coronation of Charles X.).

Yes, there he stands—you mark him down the street,
Yon dream-eyed, little, bald, round-shouldered man!
While Paris thrums her live-long rataplan
Of loud huzzas and million-surging feet.
Tyrtæus bold is he, Catullus sweet!
Or well had passed in Tempe's Vale for Pan
In modern garb; draw nearer now and scan
The form of one whom kings have feared to meet!

Ay, sirs, *here is the king!* That shape who goes.
All drums and trappings merely stuffs the crown;
Here rusty black and there the ermine shows;
The throne's a candle for our clerk's renown;
His galley toward the hungry Mælstrom rows;
Thy shallop storms nor hidden rocks may drown!

XX.

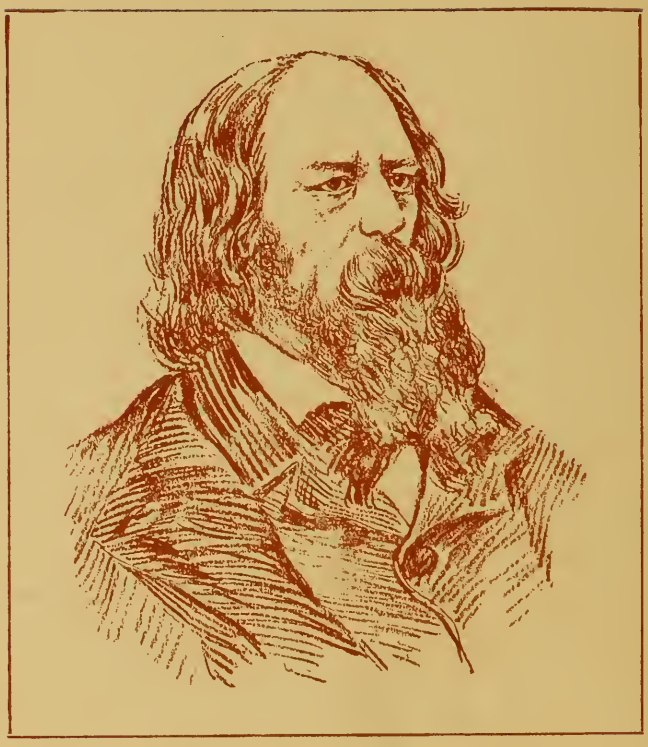


HUGO

Though banished, Prospero, to thy mid-sea isle,
Power thou retaind'st most ample ; thou could'st call
Thy choiring Ariel, or sea-monsters haul
From sounding caves by magic's strenuous wile,
Or storms unchain, or make the ocean smile,
Holding the hearts and minds of men in thrall;
Yet Jeanne, Miranda, dearer far than all
Thy art, could aye thy darkest hour beguile.

Beyond the surge thy natal dukedom lay,
Dominion of brave hearts ; thy dreaming eye
Watched with paternal longing day by day,
Its outline, where pale shadows rise and die,
'Till fell the usurper ; then resumed thy sway,
And freed thy passionate slaves of sea and sky.

XXI.

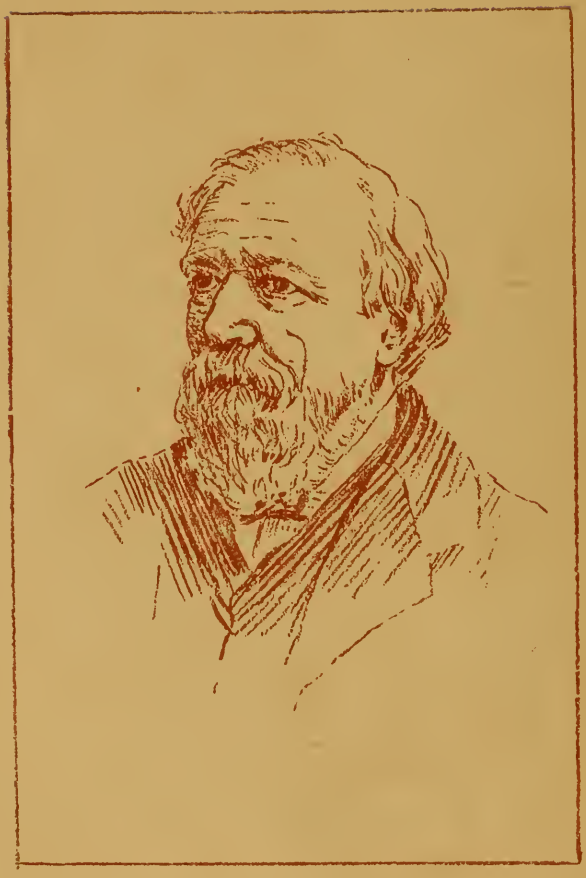


TENNYSON

Thy fame stands wide as England's! If I lay
One song-wreath at thy feet, 'tis not to grace
So much thy triumphs, or thy high-throned place
Amongst the minstrels of the modern day.
As to confess thy erstwhile sovereign sway
O'er my affections; thine was once a space
Near Shakespere; if thy lushness cloy apace,
Thy charm may change but cannot pass away.

Thou art our own King Arthur—I, a knight
Unscutcheoned, speeding for the lists of fame;
Content to win, when proved, some slight acclaim
From lips like thine; unwilling most to fail
In service and in vigil; armor bright
Besumeth him who quests the Holy Grail.

XXII.



BROWNING

The tangled currents of the rhythmic seas
Stream through thy song with many a swirl and sweep;
With storm and cloud and sunshine o'er the deep,
And bright waves lapping to the variant breeze.
Thou hast conned secrets 'tween Jove's mighty knees,
And kenned the vision of life's toiling steep,
And heard the strong men groan, the women weep,
And drank earth's gloom and glory to the lees.

What though thy careless hand hath jarred the strings.
Thy harp still rings to Thought and Beauty true;
Though from Italian earth thy phœnix springs,
Her gaze strikes over to the English blue.
O, teacher, brave and wise, the proudest things
Of Faith and Love, through fire have come from you!

XXIII.

ARNOLD

The World denied thee gold—Heaven gave thee verse;
A burst of morn on Learning's peaks of snow!
Under sweeps ever Emotion's tidal flow
Where Love her luminous chalice doth immerse.
Nature and Art, these twain, thy mother and nurse,
Formed thee to live, through thy grand age to grow;
Sonorous, pure, their mingled clarions blow,
Unchecked by Time or Change, above thy hearse.

Sohrab and Rustem, Tristram, Marguerite—
The twain of Homer's large, authentic breed;
The third, Love's Knight, faithful in word and deed;
The last, Love's perfect flower—a kindred sweet!
These for thy fame, O royal palmer, plead,
And lay their chaplets blooming at thy feet!

XXIV.

BAYARD TAYLOR

Here find the poet's scrip,—his ready pen,
The staff of service on his pilgrim round,
Now laid aside; for he in sleep is bound,
No more to wander through the ways of men;
But these his furnishings, ingathered when
He traveled all Arcadia's laurelled ground,
The cheer and nurture of his journey found,
He hath bequeathed them to the world again.

Herein note Love, his crust of daily bread,
Romance, his flask of wine, and Reverie sweet,
The rich-chased missal brought from Orient clime;
Here also Hope, his belt, and from his head
His scallop-shell of Fancy; from his feet
The rythmic sandals of his passion, Rhyme!

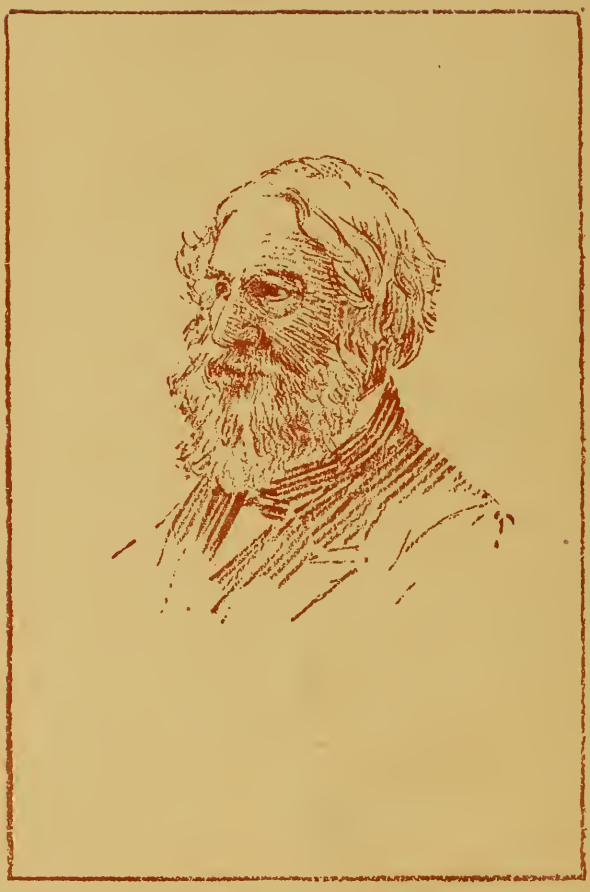
XXV.

EMERSON

Voice of the deeps thou art! But not the wild,
Ungoverned mouthing of the wind-lashed waves;
Nor yet the dirge of billows over graves,
But crooning, like a mother o'er her child.
Through thee gross earth with heaven is reconciled,
Thy songs, like anthems through cathedral naves
Dispel confusing passion; never raves
The storm along thy cloisters undefiled.

Light of the deeps thou art! as forth I glide,
From rock and whirlpool far, and tempest's roar,
Sudden there looms an ever verdurous shore,
Whose towers in the still wave stand glorified,
Where thou, the Virgil, who hast been my guide,
Lead'st me and leav'st me rapt, at Heaven's door!

XXVI.

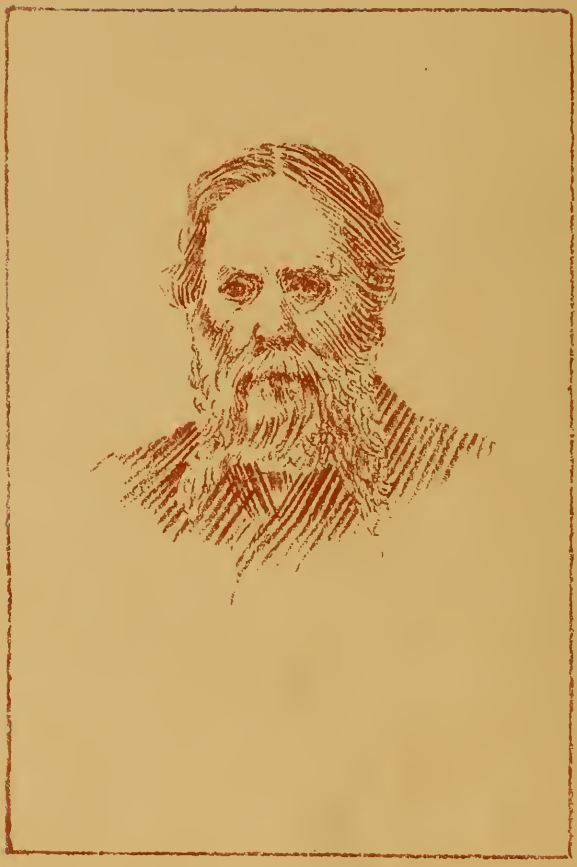


LONGFELLOW

The New-World's sweetest singer! Time may lay
Rude touch on some, thy betters, yet for thee,
Thy seat is where the throned immortals be,
The chaste affections answering to thy sway.
As fair, as fresh as children of the May,
Thy verse springs up from wood and sun-bathed lea,
Yet oft the rhythmic cadence of the sea
Rolls 'neath thy song and speeds its shining way.

Thy borrowed robes, even, thou wear'st with grace;
Such grace our English buckram seldom yields;
Through thee the grave Italian takes his place
Among us; but across Acadian fields
Who is it moves with rapt and pensive face?
Evangeline, his heart thy love reveals!

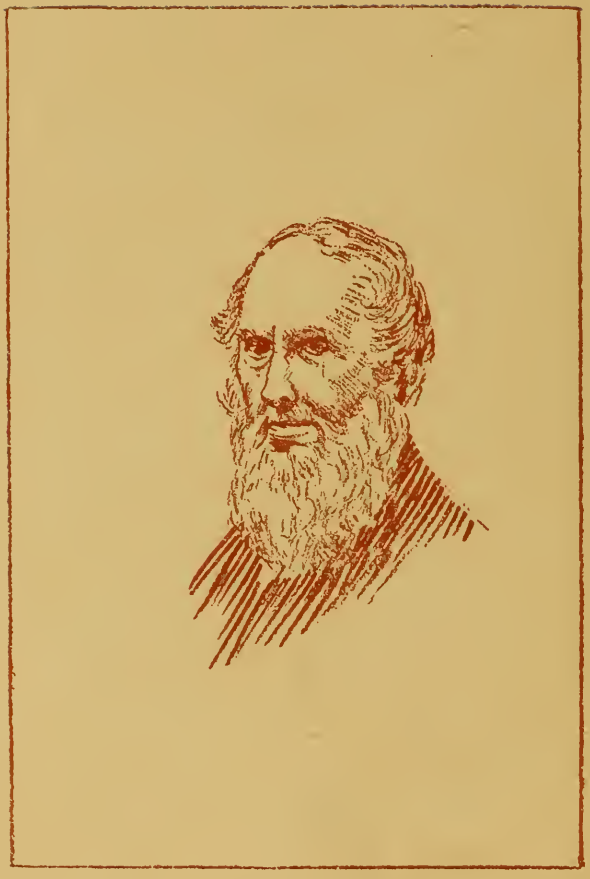
XXVII.



LOWELL

Poet, who bore thy crown of seventy years
As greenly as the chaplet of thy lays,
Who from thy throne of thought o'erlooked the maze
Of human life, high lifting midst thy peers
Heaven-lighted minstrel brows, no envious shears
Of fate may clip thy laurels, but the bays
Fame will twine with them, grow through winter days,
Sunned in our smiles and watered with our tears.

Not to the craftsman merely, nor the calm,
Keen-sighted critic, nor the patriot stirred
With passion, do our grateful hearts belong—
But to the new Crusader with his palm
And cross of valiant service, viewed and heard
Through the long, vow-knit vigil of his song.



WHITTIER

Thy call was Freedom's loudest—'neath that blast
(Down crashed the walls of Slavery's Jericho!
(Beware, ye proud, the fighting Quaker's blow,
When once he strikes ye well may stand aghast!)
Now all those storms are far forspent and past,
Thy martial trumpet forth intuned to peace,
While still to bring the courts of Heaven increase,
Those olive blooms of song abroad were cast.

O, strong and faithful watchman—may this state
In memory long that lifted warning keep!
Thy strenuous voice hath given us bonds to fate;
We dread no harm while we thy blessing reap;
Old age, 'twas never thine—a warm, sedate,
A mellow sunset brooded o'er thy sleep!

XXIX.

WHITMAN

In him, prophetic mind and cosmic heart
With common human speech were reconciled,
Heed not the jargon tongue, the phrase defiled,
The roughened hand, ignoring forms of art.
Nay, from his breast what yearning sighs depart!
Hark how those vibrant tones grow pure and mild!
While with the boundless impulse of the Child
His Earth-song rises and the echoes start.

What sentient wind makes answer? 'Tis thy breath
Borne round these shores, O Queen Democracy!
Such of those souls who throned thee, kept thee free;
Of such their faith more potent far than death:
Ay, not in vain! whate'er the Preacher saith,
The horn of Odin blows and men are free!

XXX.

MORRIS

Chaucer and Spenser, gather him to your heart,
The burly Radical of dreamy rhyme!
And crown him with the Trouvère's bay sublime,
That ne'er till now had graced the British mart;
For even to him the story-teller's art
Came glamorous out of Fancy's buoyant clime,
The mintage of that golden ore of time
From the world's childhood; for he voiced in part
Your mid-sea swaying melodies, the breath
Of pastoral lands, of flowery meads, and meres,
And your pale, poignant picturing of death,
And your dear, tender ruth for love in tears.
No idle singer, he, whate'er he saith;
His pilgrim torch relumes the shadowed years!

XXXI.

KIPLING

The East hath reared her Viking! lo, he comes
Laurelled with victory to the purpled West,
Voicing the proud, vexed century's unrest,
With fifes, harps, sackbuts, psalteries, and drums.
His galley, pitched with rare and odorous gums,
Floats far the Dragon o'er the billow's crest;
'Neath bellying sail his round world keel is pressed;
The Empire trade-wind through its cordage hums.

No vassal laureate he! he wears the crown
Of English hearts, the roses never sere;
The rooted loves that bloom in bold renown;
Those sheaves of promise ripening in the ear;
The pledge of birthright nations! 'gainst the frown
Of Fate herself, stands England's faith writ clear!

XXXII.

After
A. Castaigne

MISTRAL

O fair Provence, thou land of corn and wine!
Provence, thou sweet, sweet home of Love and Song!
In arts, in arms, in princely feeling strong,
Once more the dream of Poesy is thine!
Thine is the latest Troubadour whose line
From Ronsard runs in honor; of that throng
King gleeman, who still wind their pipes along
From towered Avignon to Camargue's blue brine.

Mereio, of Death the dearest bride,
Thy love and grief for aye, for aye are sung!
The Homer of his cherished vineyard side,
His heart still tender, bountiful, and young,
Swells bold with song, with more than Roman pride—
The brave Horatius of his native tongue!

XXXIII.

L. of C.

L'ENVOI

To Shakespere.

If I have earned some favour of good men,
Or if my song hold aught of just or true,
This happy fortune to thy grace is due,
Who things unseen hast brought within my ken;
Who hast redeemed my shallow courses when
I would run glittering on the public view,
And led'st me into quiet fields anew,
And turned'st me safe from many a noisome fen.

I fly to thee when wounded, worn, and faint,
And thou upholdest me against thy knee;
Thy volume is my rubric; no attaint
Dwells in its page, nor no absurd decree.
Companion, guide, then friend—while Love's acquaint
With Life, thy words sustain me, make me free!

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